

DECLINATION OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT TO FURNISH  
CERTAIN CORRESPONDENCE.

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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN

*Answer to a resolution of the House calling for a copy of the official letter  
of George Ihrie, late lieutenant in the army.*

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FEBRUARY 16, 1861.—Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

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WAR DEPARTMENT, *February 15, 1861.*

SIR: In reply to the resolution adopted by the House of Representatives on the 11th instant, requesting the Secretary of War to furnish the House with a copy of the official letter of George Ihrie, (late first lieutenant of the third regiment of United States artillery,) now on file in the War Department, in reply to General Harney's official letter of the 9th December, 1859, relating to the affairs of the military department of Oregon, I have the honor to state that on the 30th day of January, 1861, I transmitted to that body copies of all the correspondence on file in this department, not previously published, relating to General Harney's administration of the department of Oregon, except three letters from George Ihrie, and in reference to them I then remarked:

"There are also on file three letters, addressed to the late Secretary of War by George Ihrie, formerly a lieutenant in the United States army, under dates of 29th July, and 9th and 15th December, 1860. They make allusion to Brigadier General Harney's administration of the department of Oregon, but consist almost entirely of coarse personal denunciations of that gallant officer. Copies of these letters are withheld, since alike their vituperative language and the apparent purpose of their author forbid that this department should be in any way instrumental in giving them publicity."

The present resolution refers to one, or perhaps more, of these letters, and as I have had no reason to change the opinion expressed in regard to them in the communication cited, I must again respectfully decline furnishing the copies requested. The letters themselves, when received, should at once have been returned to their writer, and they were, no doubt, filed through inadvertence or from a lack of knowledge on the part of the Secretary of War of their true character. While I have not felt authorized to reject them from the files, I have felt still less authorized to allow this department to be used, by personal malice, for the defamation of an officer whose chivalry and loyalty to his country's flag, under all circumstances, have rendered his reputation, in a measure, the common property of the republic.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. HOLT,  
*Secretary of War.*

Hon. WILLIAM PENNINGTON,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*